

# 1998 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey

## Data Preview I: Seat Belts

Following are results from the 1998 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey conducted for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The survey employed two questionnaires, each administered by telephone to a national sample of approximately 4,000 randomly selected persons age 16 and older. Interviewing began November 5, 1998, and continued through January 12, 1999. The data are weighted to yield national estimates. Detailed results from the survey will be published later in a series of NHTSA reports.

### Reported Seat Belt Usage

The percentage of drivers reporting that they used seat belts "all of the time" when they drive has increased over the several years this survey has been administered. In 1994 the figure stood at 74%, rising to 76% in 1996 and to 79% in 1998. However, similar to previous years, a segment of these self-reported full time belt users readily admitted that they hadn't worn their seat belt recently. Among drivers who said they wore their seat belts all the time, 10% noted on a follow-up question that they did not wear their seat belt at least once while driving in the past day or week.

### Driving At Work and Seat Belt Policies

One-third (34%) of drivers reported that they at least sometimes drove a vehicle as part of a job or business (not including driving to and from work). When asked how frequently they drove on the job, most of these drivers replied "almost every day" (56%) or "a few days a week" (26%). About one-half (48%) also said their company or business had a policy requiring seat belt use when driving on the job. Usually they thought it was a written policy (67%) although some believed it was an unwritten policy (25%) while others were unsure (8%). If drivers at least on occasion wore seat belts, and believed their company had a seat belt policy, they were twice as likely as those who said there was no policy (31% to 16%) to report higher belt use when driving on the job compared to personal driving.

### Attitudes About The Benefits Of Seat Belts

The vast majority of the public (86%) strongly agreed that if they were in a motor vehicle crash, they would want to have their seat belt on; while 8% somewhat agreed. Yet responses to another question pointed to qualms about seat belts among a segment of the population as 15% of the public strongly agreed with the statement that "seat belts are just as likely to

harm you as help you" and 23% somewhat agreed. Still, about two-thirds of the public either strongly (42%) or somewhat (26%) agreed with the statement that "medical insurance costs would be lower if more people wore seat belts."

### Attitudes and Knowledge About Seat Belt Laws And Their Enforcement

At the time this survey was administered, all but one state had a seat belt law requiring usage by adults. As shown in the table on the back, most persons favored seat belt laws, and knew their state had enacted a law. The table also shows greater support and knowledge in states where the provisions of the law permit standard enforcement, i.e., law enforcement officers can stop a vehicle on the basis of witnessing a seat belt violation. In secondary enforcement states, witnessing a seat belt violation can not be the basis for stopping a vehicle; ticketing for a seat belt violation can only occur when the vehicle has been stopped for some other reason. Public support of standard enforcement increased from 52% in 1996 to 58%. Interestingly, respondents in secondary states were more likely to believe they were subject to standard enforcement provisions (41%) than secondary enforcement provisions (36%). In general, beliefs and attitudes tended to agree. Regardless of the actual provisions enacted in their state, 69% of persons who believed their state permitted standard enforcement also favored standard enforcement. Likewise, 59% of persons who believed their seat belt law was governed by secondary enforcement provisions favored secondary enforcement.



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		<b>Total</b>	<b>Standard*</b>	<b>Secondary**</b>
How do you feel about laws that require drivers and front seat passengers to wear seat belts?	Favor A Lot	67%	70%	65%
	Favor Some	19%	18%	20%
	Not Favor At All	13%	11%	13%
	Don't Know/Refused	1%	1%	1%
Do you think that seat belt laws should also apply to back seat adult passengers?	Yes	67%	69%	66%
	No	14%	14%	13%
	Depends On Age	1%	1%	2%
	Don't Know/Refused	4%	3%	4%
	***Don't Favor Front Seat Law	14%	13%	15%
Do you favor or oppose fines for drivers who do not wear seat belts?	Favor	61%	65%	58%
	Oppose	21%	19%	22%
	Don't Know/Refused	4%	4%	5%
	***Don't Favor Front Seat Law	14%	13%	15%
Do you favor or oppose receiving points against a license as a penalty for seat belt violations?	Favor	30%	34%	27%
	Oppose	49%	45%	51%
	Depends On Past Violations	3%	2%	3%
	Don't Know/Refused	5%	6%	4%
	***Don't Favor Front Seat Law	14%	13%	15%
Suppose you get a ticket for not wearing your seat belt. Which of the following better describes your likely reaction?	I Deserve The Ticket Because			
	I Broke The Law	67%	72%	63%
	Ticket Is Undeserved			
	(Use Should Be Personal Choice)	30%	25%	34%
Does (respondent's state) have a law requiring seat belt use?	Don't Know/Refused	3%	3%	3%
	Yes	94%	96%	93%
	No	1%	1%	2%
According to your state law, can police stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation or do they have to observe some other offense first in order to stop the vehicle?	Don't Know/Refused	5%	3%	6%
	Can Stop For Belt Violation	55%	74%	41%
	Have To Observe Other			
	Offense First	26%	11%	36%
	Don't Know	14%	11%	16%
In your opinion, <u>should</u> police be allowed to stop a vehicle if they observe a seat belt violation when no other traffic laws are being violated?	****Unaware Of Belt Law	6%	4%	7%
	Yes	58%	68%	50%
	No	39%	29%	46%
	Don't Know/Refused	3%	3%	4%
Have you ever received a (ticket/warning) for not wearing seat belts?	Ticket Only	6%	7%	5%
	Warning Only	4%	4%	4%
	Ticket And Warning	2%	2%	1%
	Neither	88%	87%	89%



Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding. \*Standard Enforcement States. \*\*Secondary Enforcement States. \*\*\*Includes those who did not know if they favored a front seat law. \*\*\*\*Those who said "No" or "Don't Know" to previous state question.